

2-9-2008

Confessions of a Texas Publisher/Writer*

Frances Brannen Vick

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Vick, Frances Brannen, "Confessions of a Texas Publisher/Writer*" (2008). *Carl Hertzog Lecture Series*. 14.
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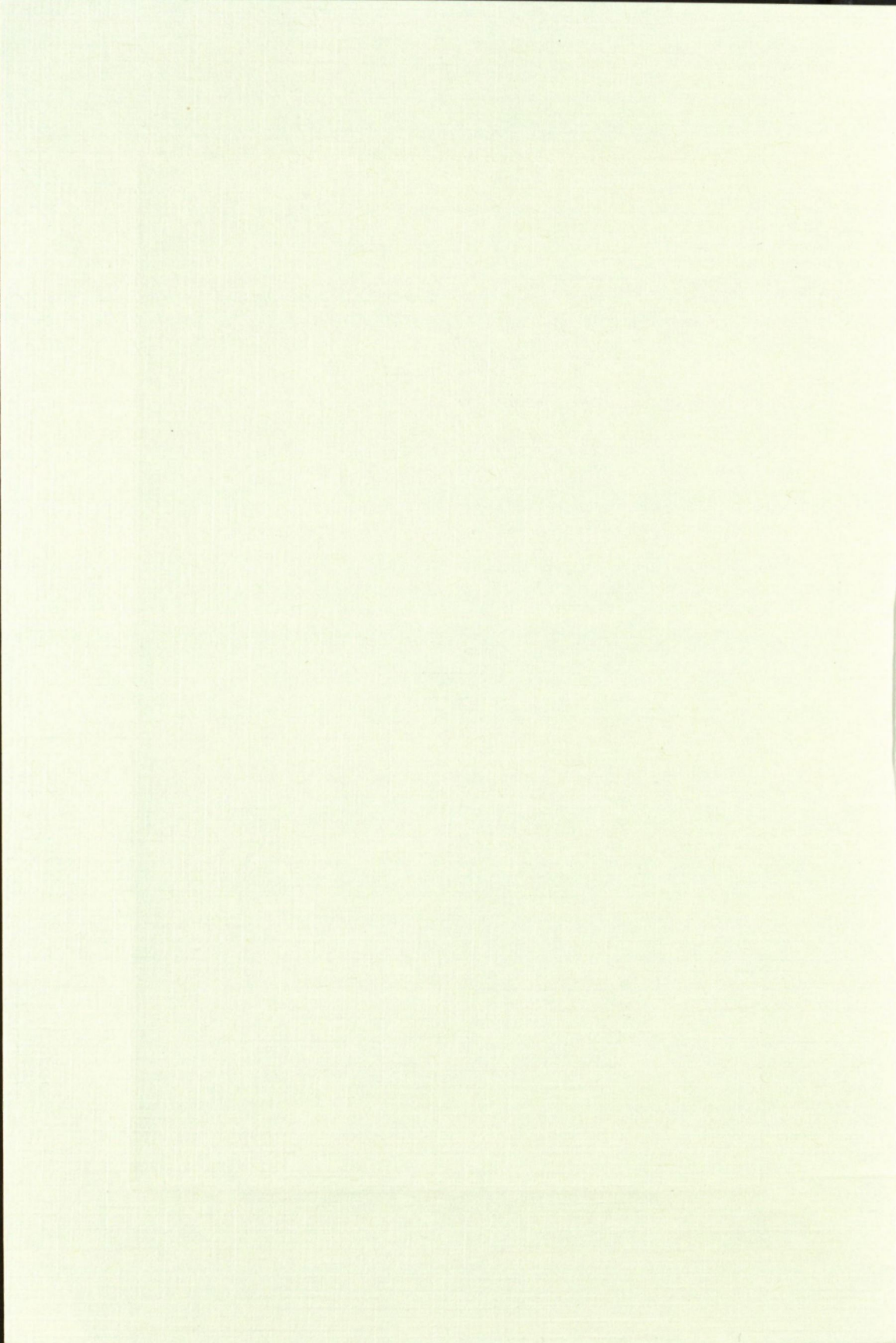
Carl
Hertzog
Lecture Series



*Confessions of a Texas Publisher/
Writer**

Frances Brannen Vick

President of the Texas Institute of Letters,
in-coming President of the Texas State Historical Association,
a fellow of the Texas Folklore Society,
and member of The Philosophical Society of Texas



Carl Hertzog Lecture Series



The 2007-2008 Carl Hertzog Award and Lecture
were made possible through generous underwriting support from:

Mr. and Mrs. Sam Moore

Mr. and Mrs. Jackson Curlin /
R. B. Price Family Foundation

Special thanks to:

Ms. Nancy Hamilton

Ms. Karen Marasco

Mr. Tom Moore

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El Paso, Texas 79968-0633



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-Permanence of Paper for printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984

Published in May, 2008, in a printing limited to 500 copies.

The Carl Hertzog Lecture Series

The Hertzog Lectures, inaugurated on February 5, 1989, and presented biennially in the month of his birth, honor the memory and life work of the "Printer at the Pass," J. Carl Hertzog (1902-1984).

A premier typographer and book designer long before his association with the University of Texas at El Paso, Mr. Hertzog brought his international renown to the then-Texas Western College in 1948. He launched Texas Western Press in 1952, serving as its director until his retirement in 1972.

Books bearing the distinctive Carl Hertzog colophon reached a standard of excellence that is unexcelled to this day.

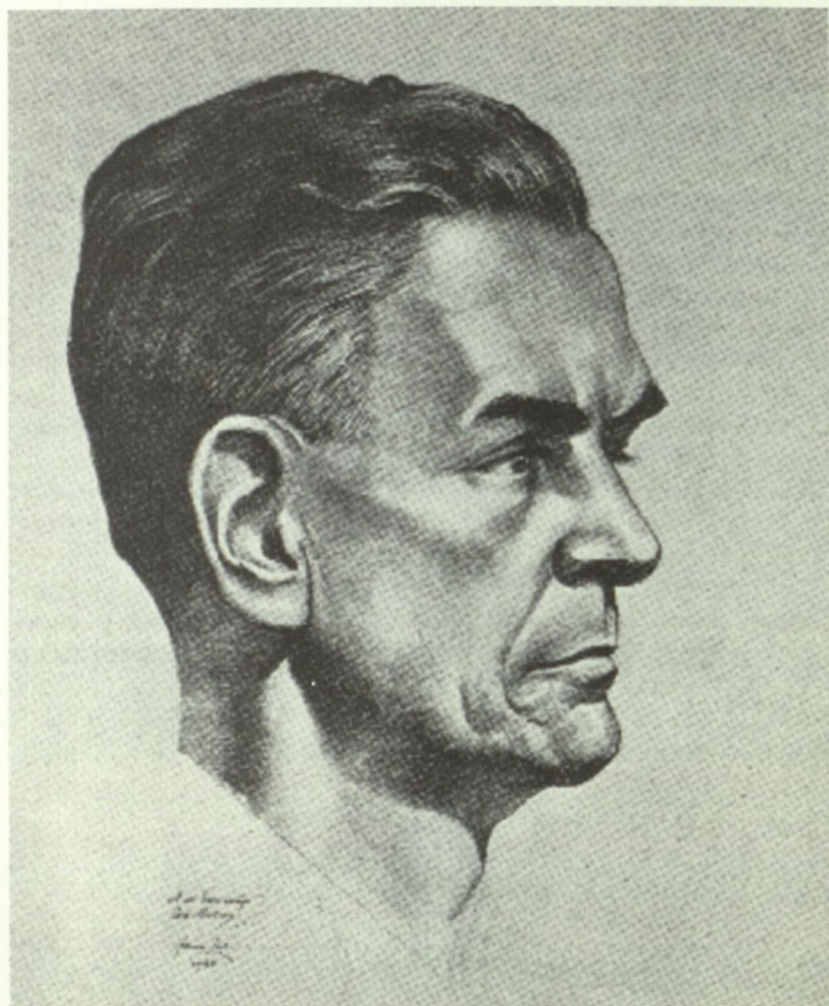
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**Texas
Western
Press**

The University of Texas at El Paso



(Drawing by Tom Lea, 1946)

J. Carl Hertzog
1902 - 1984

Confessions of a Texas Publisher/ Writer*

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February 9, 2008

*Title and idea from Frances Brannen Vick piece included in *Notes from Texas: On Writing in the Lone Star State*, edited by W. C. Jameson and published by TCU Press, Spring of 2008.

Carl Hertzog lecture series, no. 13

Confessions of a Texas Publisher/Writer*

By Frances Brannen Vick

I do not know when I have been more honored than to be asked to deliver the Carl Hertzog Lecture. Even to have my name associated with Carl Hertzog, one of the major names in Texas letters, is incredible. His founding of Texas Western Press is another coup scored by this unequaled publisher, designer, and typographer. So it is with much trepidation that I come to tell you about my little publishing career. I thought to tell you some stories of publishing Texas writers and then of starting to write myself. But I have to get some confessions out of the way.

First, I am an East Texan. I am sure you couldn't tell that from my East Texas twang, but I am. The problem with being an East Texan is that you never can quit being one. So even when I moved to the sophisticated city of Dallas and even when I knew Stanley Marcus and published some of his books and met all sorts of intellectuals and artists and writers, I still remained an East Texan and I have to confess this, too—I am a provincial East Texan. It is embarrassing to be so provincial but there it is. Furthermore, I come by it naturally, even genetically, perhaps, from deep in my family DNA.

My father's people swam the Sabine River before the Civil War and Mother's family came in 1824 and started the Fredonian Rebellion a couple of years later, being people who were ahead of their time, since the real revolution was some ten years off. So of course I am Texan to the core, making me provincial in many ways.

How can it not affect my interest in Texas writing? I love this state. I love the people. I love the writers and the publishers. I love its history and its characters. I love the state even when I hate what is happening here on occasion. As an East Texan there may be southern roots in there, but there is also something that always pulls me west to the wide-open spaces of West Texas and beyond,

even as far as El Paso, so that southern-ness is very much tempered by the pull of the west. Perhaps I am inspired by the openness of the terrain, the big sky. Perhaps the personalities of the people seem a bit like that, too.

On the other hand, the only poetry I have ever written was on a trip to New York City. I would be embarrassed to show it to anyone, but who knows? If I had found a life there I could perhaps have become a poet. I doubt that, though. My poetry never sounded like a Naomi Nye or a St. Germain or a Jan Seale or a Walt McDonald or a William Barney or any of the poets I ended up publishing. What I became instead was a publisher of those poets and other writers, with particular emphasis on Texas writers.

First I published from my own press, E-Heart Press, named after my father's old family cattle brand—those Sabine swimmers. I began, it seems to me in my arrogance, very close to the top with a Texas Folklore Society publication—*Built in Texas*, edited by F. E. Abernethy. Ab became my mentor in publishing, as J. Frank Dobie had been to Bill Witliff. When Bill stopped publishing, I stepped in with E-Heart Press to take up some of the slack by publishing the Texas Folklore Society publications. I was learning from the bottom up, since I knew nothing about publishing. I had been teaching English all those years before, so it was a fast learning curve.

The Texas Folklore Society Publications were the hook on which I hung my entire publishing career, both E-Heart Press and the University of North Texas Press. There is no way to discount their importance to me and to the presses I was involved with. It brought me many writers who were members of the Society, such as Jim Lee with his *Classics of Texas Fiction* and later *Texas, My Texas*. He was also a friend who was instrumental in getting me to help found the University of North Texas Press. Other folklorists I published were Joe Graham with his work on the ranches and people and folklore of South Texas. Alan Govenar and Jay Brakefield brought their work on Deep Ellum in Dallas. Roy Bedichek's letters to his family kept me laughing when I wasn't musing about his observations. Ken Davis just kept me laughing, with his *Black Cats, Hoot Owls and Water Witches*. The title alone

gives pause, you have to admit. There were many others, of course—Lou Rodenberger and Sylvia Grider, with their interest in *Texas Women Writers* (with a book by that title), who asked me to write a chapter about Texas women in publishing.

Archie MacDonald called me one day with what I was sure would be a treatise on Texas history. What he brought me instead was *Helpful Cooking Hints for Househusbands of Uppity Women*, a cookbook that took him all the way to the Today Show in New York City because of *his* title. His uppity woman was the mayor of Nacogdoches at the time. The mayor of Huntsville was another uppity woman, Jane Monday, who would lure me into writing in later years. You have to watch out for East Texas uppity women. They can be very cunning.

As I published and read Texas writers, I learned from them. What I learned is that they are all as different as they can be and yet Texan to the core. Elmer Kelton is always at home in his part of the state in West Texas and he makes his reader comfortable there, too. Although I never published Elmer, except in Texas Folklore Society books, I published Judy Alter's critical biography of him. Earlier my good friend Ellen of Ellen Temple Publishing and E-Heart Press co-published Judy Alter's Maggie books for young adults. I now have a book being published by Judy from TCU Press, *Literary Dallas*, due out in the fall. These friendships have been long and enduring.

John Erickson delighted us with the antics of his cowdog, Hank, who is in charge of security on the ranch in Ochiltree County in the Panhandle, which I unfortunately did not publish. However, he also wrote of his own adventures as a cowboy and his observations of the people of the Panhandle and I was lucky enough to publish those. Joyce Roach, that "high-toned woman" from the Cross Timbers, sometimes gets the rest of us tickled with her escapades at revivals and other places, but also informs us of high-toned women in general and of *The Cowgirls*. She on occasion fights it out with Robert Flynn on who has the best hometown—Chillicothe or Jacksboro. Flynn, with his Baptist boots firmly planted in the West, keeps us entertained, but he also makes us think about the travails as well as joys of the old folks who went before.

A. C. Greene, who never forgot his Abilene roots, moved easily into Dallas life and literature, although some of the books from his West Texas days are hard to forget—his *The Santa Claus Bank Robbery* stacks up well against the Bonnie and Clyde books for rogues on the run, and there is his classic of West Texas, *A Personal Country*, both of which I reprinted. I also published his *500 Miles on the Butterfield Trail* in which he and his wife followed the old trail through Texas in their Lincoln Town Car, considerably more comfortably than the old coaches used on the trail in the 1800s. That trail came through El Paso, of course. He also reminded me that the *WPA Guide to Dallas* was languishing in the Dallas Public Library and had been there since the 1930s. That manuscript was already edited, designed, and had all the photographs selected and placed. It was just waiting to be found and published, so we did that with the Dallas Public Library.

East Texan Jane Roberts Wood went West as a child and was forever marked by it, although she occasionally travels back East to her first roots in her novels. Her first Lucy book, published by Ellen Temple, took us West in her classic *The Train to Estelline* but brought us back East for *A Place Called Sweet Shrub*, and then back out West again for the third book in the Lucy trilogy—*Dance A Little Longer*. We kept the books in print as a trilogy, as they had been planned to be.

Jane is a marketer in sheep's clothing. After the *Train to Estelline* came out she decided there should *be* a train to Estelline to advertise it, so she wrote the CEO of Burlington Northern, sent him a copy of *The Train to Estelline*, and asked him if he would give her a train. The poor confused man called her and asked her what sort of train she wanted. Jane told him she wanted a passenger train that would go from Fort Worth to Estelline. I assume he was so surprised at the request that he granted it, even though there had not been a passenger train on that track for at least 40 years. We all piled on the train he provided, equipped with fantastic food and libations of all sorts, and had a perfectly marvelous time traveling on the train to Estelline. The tracks were lined with people waving to us and holding up grandchildren who had never seen a passenger train on the track. That trip gave Jane

enough leverage on publicity and book sales that she ended up with a New York contract.

I was lucky enough to run across Evelyn Oppenheimer, Jean Andrews and Madge Roberts, all of whom fulfilled some dreams of mine. Evelyn brought me Stanley Marcus's work and an added bonus was her own memoir of her years in book reviewing. She enriched me in many other ways, including telling me when I was wrong and always being totally honest with me. It is a rare gift to have such a friend. That unusual and recognizable voice of hers, giving book reviews, was one that enlightened radio listeners for four decades.

Jean Andrews, with her impeccable scholarship, her exquisite art, and her dry wit was always a joy to work with. Her *American Wildflower Florilegium* allowed me to publish a four-color book in a stunning presentation that contained both her art and her scholarship. I sold that book to the Book-of-the-Month Club, which was not a hard sell, for when I walked into the buyer's office, I was met by walls full of floral paintings! Jean's next book was *The Pepper Trail*, her research that gave her the name of The Pepper Lady. She received a Jane Grigson Award from the International Association of Culinary Professionals for that book, joining such luminaries as Julia Child.

Madge Roberts brought me Sam Houston and the letters he had written to his family, she being the great-great-granddaughter of the man himself. The letters were contained in four volumes and could not have been done without Madge Roberts because she knew where all the bones were buried, so to speak. Following on the heels of Sam Houston came Jane Monday and Patricia Smith with a book on Sam Houston's servant, Joshua Houston. Jane, as I mentioned earlier, would later lead me into the world of South Texas and Petra Kenedy by asking me to co-author *Petra's Legacy: The South Texas Ranching Empire of Petra Vela and Mifflyn Kenedy*.

Evelyn Oppenheimer bringing Stanley Marcus to the press was a great honor and pleasure. He is one of my heroes and role models. I have hanging on my wall a letter Mr. Stanley wrote lauding me as a publisher. I treasure it because it is from him. He writes that in publishing his books, "She was a delight to work

with at all times and if anyone in her industry has given publishing a polished-eye instead of a black-eye, it would have to be Frances Vick." I can die happy now. I have been handed kudos by my hero.

Bryan Woolley, one of your own former students, and other writers from the *Dallas Morning News* brought me *Final Destinations: A Travel Guide to Remarkable Cemeteries*. It contains Bryan's piece on El Paso's Concordia Cemetery. Bryan also has a very large presence in *Literary Dallas* with excerpts from *The Bride Wore Crimson*, first published by Texas Western Press, and *November 22nd*, his novel of the Kennedy assassination. I know you are proud of him. He is a fine writer and a fine man.

Lynn Cuny made me fall in love with buzzards because of her wonderful stories from her wildlife sanctuary, one of them being about a heroic buzzard with a damaged wing making it impossible for her to fly. After being blown away by a storm, she walked back no one knows how many miles to Lynn's sanctuary. It took her weeks and when she finally arrived at home she went straight to the children's plastic wading pool kept by her roost and thankfully sank her aching feet in it. I will never look at buzzards with the same eyes again, nor most wild animals, thanks to Lynn's observations in *Through Animals' Eyes*.

Because then Chancellor Al Hurley of the University of North Texas led one of the most intellectually stimulating seminars on military history in the country, I began publishing military history. That brought me the delightful Frank "Foo" Fujita, Japanese-American from Abilene, Texas, of all places, with his inspiring story of capture by the Japanese in World War II. Foo secretly kept a diary while he was a prisoner, hiding it in the wall each night. It included events and pictures he drew of his life there. The diary was recovered by the FBI when Tokyo Rose was going on trial and was used in the trial. It is an amazing story of courage and endurance.

Military historian Cal Chrisman brought me *Lost in the Victory*, observations of the children of the men who were killed in World War II, stories that had not been told of the effect on the families of the men killed in the war. One of them was of a son left with his mother who became deranged after hearing the news of

her husband's death. She refused to believe he was dead and thought her husband was speaking to her in code from the radio, which she listened to all day to receive his messages. She refused the insurance money from the government because her husband wasn't dead, and the son somehow managed to go to school, work, and take care of both of them even though he was a child. I have found the world to be full of heroic people.

I found great joy in putting people in print who had been ignored, such as James Thomas Jackson from the 5th Ward in Houston and his inspiring, *Waiting in Line at the Drugstore*. James Thomas worked as a messenger for a photography laboratory in Houston. One of his jobs was to go to the corner drugstore each morning to get donuts and coffee for the people in the lab. In those days before integration, James Thomas had to stand and wait until all of the white customers had been served at the counter. He discovered a bookcase with books for a lending library while he was waiting and he started reading the books and it changed his life. He fell in love with the English language and the writing of it. As he says, no telling where he would have ended up if he had not waited in line at the drugstore. I am glad I found his work and could publish it.

G. William Jones brought me *Black Cinema Treasures Lost and Found*, about the cache of films he found in a Tyler warehouse, films directed and acted in by Spencer Williams, of Amos 'n Andy fame, made specifically for black audiences. I never knew there were such films and I am sure most of the white world didn't. Those films and the knowledge of them is part of our history that would have been lost without Bill Jones.

Journalist Jay Milner brought his often hilarious *The Confessions of a Maddog, A Romp through the High-flying Texas Music and Literary Era of the Fifties to the Seventies*. What a hoot that was to read and to publish. Who could forget the wild flaming ride with the legendary newspaperman Stanley Walker riding shotgun in Jay's mode of transportation, a hearse, which he named, what else, William Randolph Hearse. The hearse was being pulled through Lampasas by a dilapidated green pickup truck in an attempt to get it started. The hearse was too heavy for the pickup

to push. Unfortunately the hearse caught on fire and was causing quite a stir as it was pulled through town with flames and smoke pouring forth. Walker commented that it would give a person pause to see a hearse racing along that was on fire. What were the implications of that?

Donald Vogel, whose name and gallery became known internationally when he uncovered the art fraud played upon Algor Meadows who was sold millions of dollars of fakes, wrote about that and other experiences in the Texas art scene in *Memories and Images*. He gave me the most marvelous gift upon my retirement from publishing from the University of North Texas—a portrait of a woman reading a book, Fran Vick? I think it might be.

All of this aside, I have to confess to you—publishing was a lot easier for me than writing. I published some 200 books in the twenty years I was a publisher and I felt that I knew about publishing at the end of all that. Maybe I will get the hang of this writing business one of these days if I live long enough, but at the moment I have nothing but the highest admiration for the writers I have published. It is tough work. Red Smith told the late *Texas Monthly* writer Grover Lewis: “Writing’s easy. All you do is sit down at the typewriter and wait for little drops of blood to appear on your forehead.” My hat is off to Texas writers and Texas publishers. They all deserve medals.

Texas is so big and has such a colorful history that it is an incredibly rich field to mine. To write about it, you have to start digging. That is where the work comes in. In publishing, you learn a lot about a variety of things, but you are not digging into the subject. You are editing or proofreading or approving designs and all the other details that go into producing a book, and you are learning about the subject as you do all of these things, but you are not doing that digging the writer has done.

J. Frank Dobie made a pitch in 1936 for Texas writers to write about their own spot in the universe. His exact words were, “great literature transcends its native land but there is none that I know of that ignores its own soil.” Joyce Carol Oates at the Mayborn writer’s conference at the University of North Texas said, “The regional voice is the universal voice.” Although I will never

produce the great literature Dobie is referring to, nor is there much chance my writing will ever be considered universal, it would be impossible for me to ignore my native soil. It is that DNA thing, you know.

Texas has defined my whole life as it did my parents' and grandparents' and those on back down the line. My earliest memories are of climbing onto my father's lap and begging him to "tell me some more bull." That was my mother's opinion of the family stories he spun for me. My father's stories formed a basis of how I would understand myself and where I came from. How my ancestors responded to events he told me of would influence my own actions and my understanding of my DNA and what I owed it. Later it would help me understand my mispronunciations of words and my East Texas twang and yes, my provincialism.

So there it is, my friends—my confession and my truth as a Texas publisher/writer—all laid out in a not-so-neat package.

*Title and idea from Frances Brannen Vick piece included in *Notes from Texas: On Writing in the Lone Star State*, edited by W. C. Jameson and published by TCU Press, Spring of 2008.



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Frances Brannen Vick

BIOGRAPHY

Frances B. Vick holds B.A. and M.A. degrees in English from the University of Texas at Austin and Stephen F. Austin State University, respectively, and a Doctor of Humane Letters (honoris causa) from the University of North Texas. She taught English at Baylor University and at Stephen F. Austin State University, among other institutions, before beginning a publishing career with the establishment of E-Heart Press. As director of the University of North Texas Press she guided the publishing of some 200 books. She has chapters in *The Family Saga: A Collection of Texas Family Legends*, *Texas Women on the Cattle Trails*, and *Texas Women Writers*. In addition to *Petra's Legacy: The South Texas Ranching Empire of Petra Vela and Mifflin Kenedy* with co-author Jane Monday, she is also writing a book entitled "Literary Dallas" for TCU Press.

She is the president of the Texas Institute of Letters, in-coming President of the Texas State Historical Association, a fellow of the Texas Folklore Society, member of The Philosophical Society of Texas. She is a member of the President's Council, and an Honorary Alumna of the University of North Texas. At The University of Texas at Austin, she is a member of the President's Council, member of the Development Board, the Advisory Council of the College of Liberal Arts and Advisory Council of the University of Texas Libraries. She is a Life Member of Texas Exes and member of the Heritage Society Board at Texas Exes.



Robert Philip Buchert

**2007-2008 Recipient of the Carl Hertzog Award
for Excellence in Book Design**

Title: The Allegory of the Olive Tree

Author: Joseph Smith, Jr.

Publisher: Tryst Press, 2006

Printer: Tryst Press

**Remarks by Robert Buchert at the Carl Hertzog Lecture,
February 9, 2008:**

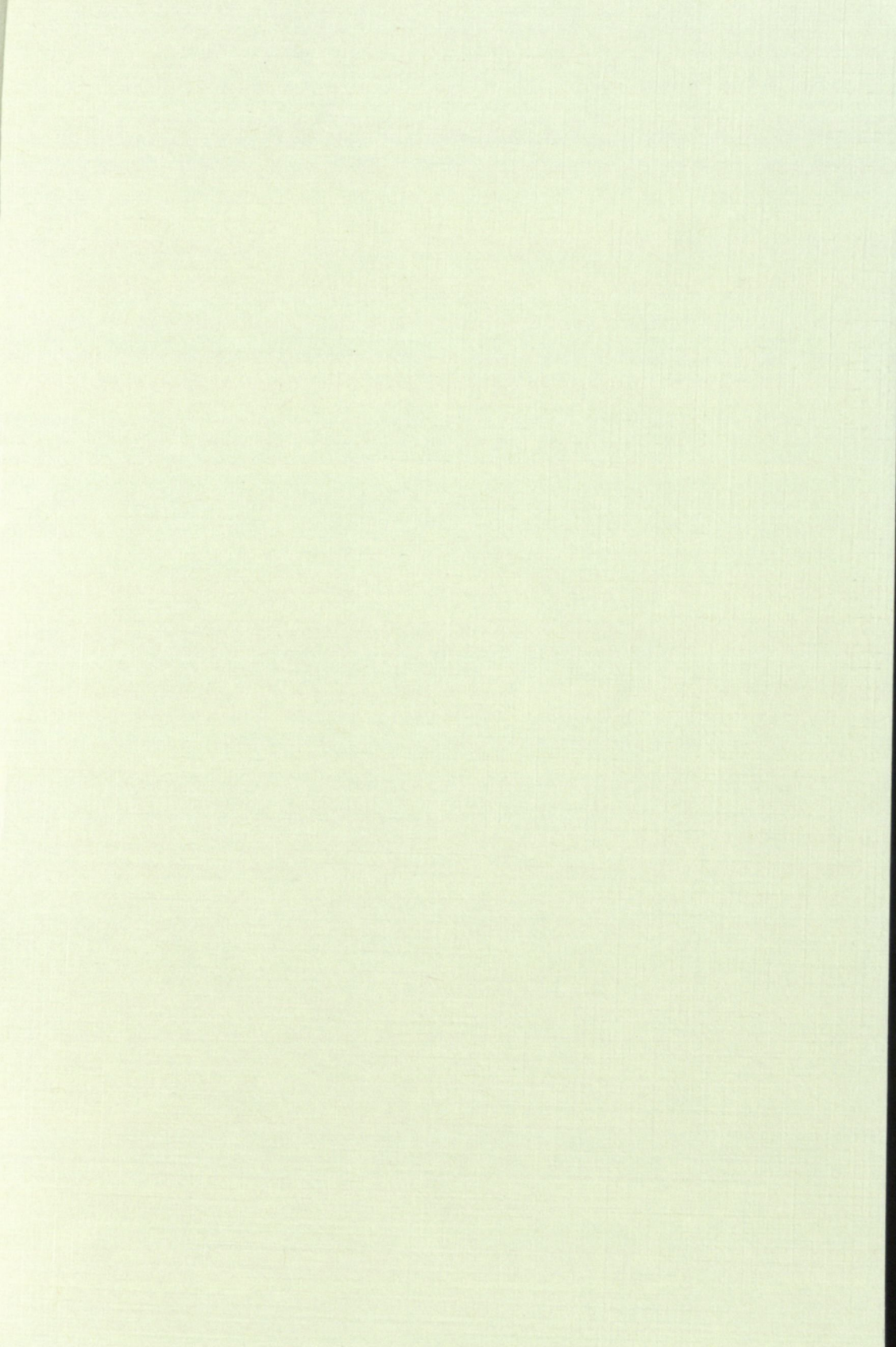
On behalf of my wife, Georgia, and myself, thank you very much. After finding out we had won the Hertzog Award I did a little research into people who had previously won. It's a coveted award and among other things I saw the CVs of a number of artists who, in their desire to be associated with the award, made statements such as «considered for the Hertzog Award». My assumption is that they submitted work. It's not often that merely submitting work to a competition makes it onto one's CV, and so we're very honored at this time to actually receive the award.

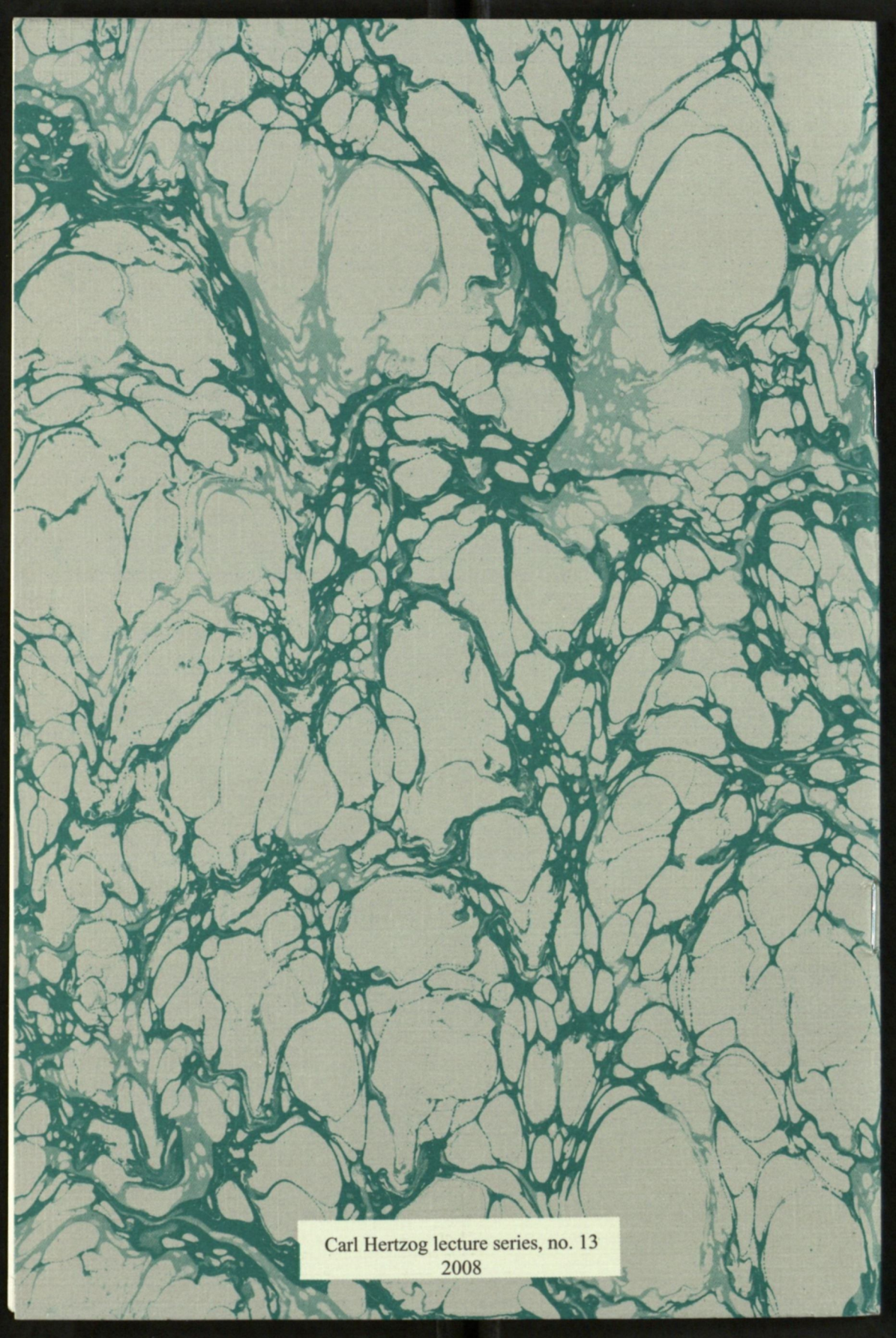
We've really enjoyed our stay in El Paso. All my knowledge of El Paso to this point has been through a song my dad used to sing to my brothers and sisters and me. We haven't yet seen that cantina. We've also been impressed by the respect given to Carl Hertzog. This is a rare thing for a book designer and I think it wonderful. I heard a statement a few months ago: «The greatest service that you can do is to do for someone what he can't do for himself.» This is the role of the book designer. A book designer doesn't write the text, but he can create an environment that helps the reader understand the text. And isn't this the role of a library, or a university, to do for people what they can't do for themselves? Frances Vick spoke about the young man who had access only to a drugstore lending library—what would have happened to him had he never be given that resource? So, thank you for the examples of service we've seen on this campus and by the Friends of the Library and again, we're very honored by this award. Thank you.

BIOGRAPHY

Robert Philip Buchert

It's natural enough to become a book designer when your last name is derived from *Buch*, the German word for book, particularly when the family into which you were born involves books in nearly every activity. Robert Buchert wrote, designed and illustrated his first book (with assistance from his mother) at the age of 5 and was hooked. His family, peripatetic while his parents pursued various interests and degrees, moved back and forth across the U.S. until finally making their home in a community just north of Toronto, Canada. This is where Rob, nurtured by Toronto's thriving art scene, began pursuing his artistic inclinations in earnest. The idea of a career in publishing took root in Rob's mind, so after serving a two-year mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints he began casting about for a school that offered a publishing degree. None existed at the time so he settled into a journalism program at a college in Utah, convenient for skiing, rock-climbing, and backpacking. After stealing a classmate's girlfriend and marrying her, Rob and his wife, Georgia, established Tryst Press as a way to explore all aspects of the book — from conceptualization to the finished volume. Since 1992, Tryst Press has grown into a letterpress printery, a graphic design studio, a paper mill, a type foundry, a bindery and, of course, a publishing house. Tryst Press books are found in public and private collections throughout North America and Europe. While Tryst Press is a full-time commitment, Rob occasionally teaches workshops and gives demonstrations at local colleges and universities. He is also a part-time instructor in the Visual Arts Department at Brigham Young University, a clever way to enjoy faculty privileges at the library.





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